

## **The Gospel of John (80); Jesus washes the Feet of His Disciples (1)**

### **I. Introduction:**

Let us turn to John 13. With the conclusion of John 12, the public ministry of our Lord Jesus came to an end. Before us begins an account of the last few days of our Lord's earthly ministry just prior to His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. It is a record of His personal and private ministry to His disciples. Let us provide several remarks about this section of Scripture before us.

#### **A. The private ministry of Jesus to His disciples**

In the next five chapters of this Gospel, chapters 13 through 17, through our Lord's interaction with His disciples, we will consider how we may grow closer to our Lord and to one another as His disciples. We will also give attention to the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is set before us more clearly and fully than in any place in Scripture. In these chapters we will also consider some of the deepest thoughts and affections of our Lord Jesus as He bares His soul instructing His disciples and in praying unto His Father.

Most of the information that we have before us in these chapters is unique to John's Gospel, information that is not contained in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>1</sup> But curiously there is information in the Synoptics that is not to be found in this Fourth Gospel. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) wrote of these differences:

A careful reader of the four Gospels can hardly fail to remark, that in St. John's account of the last six days of our Lord's ministry, many things mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are entirely omitted.

The parable of the two sons,-- of the householder who let out the vineyard, -- of the wedding garment, --of the ten virgins, -- of the talents, -- of the sheep and the goats, are left out. The second cleansing of the temple, -- the cursing of the barren fig tree, -- the public discussion with the chief priests and elders about John's baptism, -- the silencing of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the lawyers, -- the public denunciation to the multitude of the scribes and Pharisees, -- all these interesting matters are found in or other of the three Gospels, but passed over in silence in the fourth. We cannot doubt that there were wise reasons.

But the most striking thing in St. John's narrative at this point, is the entire absence of our Lord's famous prophecy upon the Mount of Olives, and the institution of the Lord's Supper. Both these interesting portions of our Lord's last doings before His crucifixion, which are most fully given in the first three Gospels, are completely omitted in the fourth.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most significant distinction between John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels is the absence of any mention by John of the observance and establishment of the Lord's Supper. It would seem that the testimony of an early church writer must be true, that John had purposed, after the Synoptic Gospels had been written and circulated, to include in his Gospel teaching and events not covered by the other three Gospel writers.

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<sup>1</sup> The Synoptic Gospels include Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 5.

## B. John's dating of the crucifixion

As we begin this section of John's Gospel one of the major issues that should be addressed is the matter of *John's timing of the crucifixion of Christ*. It is clear that the Synoptic Gospels record our Lord's last supper, His arrest and trials to have begun on the evening of the Passover. Mark 14:12 reads, "And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, 'Where will You have us go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" It is argued that this preparation for the Passover would have been done the day before their festive meal. It is well attested that the Passover in that year occurred beginning at sundown on Thursday concluding with sundown on Friday, according to the manner that the Jews tracked a full day. As one wrote, "In that particular year, the Passover ran from 6:00 p.m. Thursday to about 6:00 p.m. Friday."<sup>3</sup> The preparations for the meal would have been on the day before, that being Wednesday. And so, it is universally acknowledged that according to the Synoptics, Jesus was arrested on Thursday evening, after the Passover meal, which would have been on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month Nisan according to the Jewish calendar. However, there are many biblical scholars that believe John in His Gospel set forth the last supper of Jesus to have been on Wednesday evening of that week, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, not Thursday evening, which would mean that Jesus was crucified on Thursday, at the very time when the Jews would have been sacrificing their lambs for their Passover meals. **George Beasley-Murray** (1916-2000) succinctly presented the "problem."

The last discourse opens with a statement of time: "It was just before the Passover festival... during the meal Jesus rises..." The Evangelist appears to suggest that the farewell meal in which Jesus instructed His disciples took place on the *eve* of the Passover, i.e. the day *before* the feast. He later reports the anxiety of the high priests, in the trial before Pilate, not to defile themselves and thereby prevented from celebrating the Passover (18:28). The Synoptic Gospels, on the other hand, indicate that Jesus celebrated with His disciples the Passover (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:15). There appears to be a clash of dates here, and scholars divide themselves over which tradition is right and which is wrong.<sup>4</sup>

Here are the words of **Donald Carson** on this matter:

Seven verses in John's Gospel, however, have convinced most scholars that John places the last supper the night before, on Wednesday evening, 14 Nisan (John 13:1, 27; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, 42). This reckoning assigns Jesus' crucifixion to Thursday afternoon, at the time of the slaughtering of the Passover lambs at the temple in preparation for the Passover that lay just ahead. Theologically, this means that the last supper cannot easily be construed as a paschal meal (i.e. Passover meal), even if the link between Jesus' death and the slaughter of the lambs might be considered a significant gain (cf. 1:29, 34); historically, this reckoning introduces such a jarring contradiction with the Synoptics that most commentators have felt it necessary either to approve of one scheme while condemning the other, or to propose some kind of resolution.<sup>5</sup>

**F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) addressed the problem in this way:

The opening time-note, "It was before the festival of the Passover", refers not simply to the words immediately following but to the upper room narrative as a whole and indeed to the record of the crucifixion which follows, as is made plain from John 18:28. To relate John's passion chronology

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 455.

<sup>4</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 224. Beasley-Murray was a prominent Baptist scholar, the Principal of Spurgeon's College, London, and later Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

with that of the Synoptics, who quite clearly describe the Last Supper as a Passover meal, would require a separate excursus; suffice it to say here that while John times his passion narrative with reference to the official temple date of that of the Passover, our Lord and His disciples, following (it may be) another calendar, observed the festival earlier. Our present concern is with the exegesis of what John does say, but this exegesis, from time to time, will bring out points of relevance to this long-standing problem.<sup>6</sup>

The view that I would prefer to take is that John's Gospel also sets forth the last supper to have been our Lord's observance of the Passover meal. Donald Carson takes this position, of which I sympathize. As matters of dating arise in the text, we will from time to time address them.<sup>7</sup>

## II. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-17)

The first episode that we will consider in detail is the Lord washing the feet of His disciples. Here we see the amazing humiliation of our Savior as He serves His disciples. Without having any regard for His own honor in the eyes of others, He shows by example the attitude that should characterize His people and how they should regard and treat one another. Here is **John 13:1-17**.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup>And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup>rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup>After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. <sup>6</sup>Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

<sup>8</sup>Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

<sup>9</sup>Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." <sup>11</sup>For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

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<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 278f.

<sup>7</sup> Beasley-Murray argued that there was no disagreement of the record of all four Gospel writers: "Some features in the representations of the Last Supper in the four Gospels suggest a different line of thought. It is a curious fact that the Synoptic Gospels, in their varied records of the words and acts of Jesus in the Last Supper, make virtually no mention of the Passover (e.g., there is no mention of the Passover Lamb); on the other hand some elements in the Fourth Gospel intimate an agreement with the tradition *behind* its account with the Synoptic dating of the Last Supper; e.g., Jesus and the disciples *recline* at the meal, a feature unusual in Jewish evening meals, but mandatory for the Passover celebration in early Judaism. More importantly, John 19:14 must represent the same day as 19:31, and that has implications for 18:28, since 19:31 denotes *the eve of the sabbath of the Passover* week, not the eve of the Passover meal (see J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover* [London: 1963] 36-37, and C. C. Torey, "The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel," [JBL 50 [1931] 227). Bultmann pointed out that if the "high sabbath" of 19:31 was the day of the sheaf offering, that would make it Nisan 16, which in turn implies that would make it Nisan 15, as represented in the Synoptic Gospels (676 n. 6). One can but acknowledge that further patient investigation of the traditions behind the Lord's Supper accounts of the four Gospels is clearly required. [George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 225]

<sup>12</sup>So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup>You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. <sup>14</sup>If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup>For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. <sup>17</sup>If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

We may consider this episode by means of this outline:

1. John’s introduction to this portion of his Gospel (13:1)
2. Jesus began to wash the feet of the disciples (13:2-3)
3. Peter’s reaction to Jesus’ action (13:4-9)
4. Jesus’ response to Peter’s protest (13:10-11)
5. Jesus’ resultant instructions to His disciples (13:12-17)

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#### **A. John’s introduction to this portion of his Gospel (13:1)**

We read John’s introduction to this episode with the declaration of the deep, unending love of Jesus Christ for “His own.” **Verse 1** reads,

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

John sets the stage for the final events in the life of Jesus prior to His death on His cross. The context is “the Feast of the Passover.” On the night of the original Passover in the days of Moses, God sent the angel of death through the land of Egypt bringing death upon all of the firstborn of that land. The families of Israel were spared this judgment of God by having in advance of that night slayed a Passover lamb, one for each household. The Lord passed over the home of the Israelites who had applied the blood of the lamb to the door post of their house. Of Moses it was written, “By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them” (Heb. 11:28). The Israelite family was safe inside its home, while feasting upon the roasted sacrificial lamb, even as the Lord executed great slaughter throughout Egypt. With Egypt soundly defeated, pharaoh pronounced the immediate release of the Israelites from slavery and their exodus commenced, which God one day would bring His people into their Promised Land of rest.

The Passover was the Old Testament *type* of God’s salvation from the enslavement of sin to which the death of Jesus Christ on His cross was the New Testament *antitype*. Jesus Christ is the true Passover to which the Old Testament event and feast pointed. As Paul wrote, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). And due to the application of the blood (sacrificial death) of Jesus Christ to our own lives through faith, we have escaped the judgment of God upon our sin.

The death of Jesus was the sacrifice of the true Lamb of God which takes away sin. His death was also an “exodus.” Just as the Israelites experienced an exodus from Egypt, our Lord also underwent His exodus from this fallen world, returning to His home in heaven from which the Father had sent Him. Luke had described the exodus of Jesus, or departure, when He was on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his *departure*, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30f)

The Greek word translated as “departure” is **τὴν ἔξοδον** (*exodon*), literally, “the exodus.” When Jesus died upon His cross, He experienced an exodus from this world. Again, John wrote, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father...”<sup>8</sup>

John revealed that Jesus was mindful of His commission of the Father, that He had been sent to die—“Jesus knew that His hour had come.” John also makes mention of the motivation of Jesus that carried Him on toward His destined end—“Having loved His own.” Some have said the “His own” refers to the Jewish people generally, for John had written in the first chapter of his Gospel that Jesus “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). But in the immediate context of John 13, clearly “His own” is a reference to His disciples that were with Him. But within the larger context of the Gospel, “His own” refer to His elect, the ones that the Father had given to Him from eternity, the ones for whom the Father sent Him to save through His death upon His cross. We may see this as recently as John 10:14f, in which He said, “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by *My own*.<sup>15</sup> As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” Here His own are the elect, chosen by God the Father in eternity and given to His Son as His people, as His possession, as His own. And here in John 13:2, we read, “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

The Lord has a special, covenantal love for His people that He does not have for all others. Although He is loving to all, because His very nature is love, He actually loves His people uniquely and specially. He loves them with an eternal, redemptive love.

Paul wrote of the special love that God has for His elect. When giving instruction to the Christians in the church at Colossae, he wrote, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and *beloved*, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” (Col. 3:12). Paul described Christians with three very rich terms. We are (1) “God’s chosen ones”; we are (2) “holy”; and we are (3) “beloved.”

(1) In Colossians 3:12 we are described as *God’s chosen ones*. The NKJV reads, “the elect of God.” Our election speaks of God having chosen us in eternity past that we would be the recipients of His grace in salvation. All who are saved from sin throughout human history, are saved because God had individually chosen them in eternity that He would save them from their sin unto eternal life through His Son. God’s election of us was not because He foresaw some good in us or that He knew beforehand of their own “free will” choose Him. Election is the sovereign act of God whereby He chooses a people out of fallen humanity to be the recipients of His saving grace, leaving the rest of mankind to receive His justice for their sin.

Here is the biblical doctrine of election stated: *God has chosen certain persons from fallen humanity to be recipients of His salvation, having chosen them before creation in Christ, not based on any foreseen condition or response of them, but solely due to His own good pleasure according to the purpose of His will.* For clarification we might mention several points with respect to this doctrine for

(a) Election follows the understanding of man’s total depravity, or total inability to come to God. Left on his own, even after having been instructed, admonished, persuaded, and pleaded with, man would still choose to reject God’s rule over him, for he is spiritually dead, both incapable and unwilling to do the things God has commanded him. Man’s salvation must originate from outside of himself. It originates in God’s election.

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<sup>8</sup> His death in the transfiguration is called His exodus or departure, but here in John 13:1 there is a different Greek word translated “departure”, which is the verb **μεταβῆ** (*metabay*).

(b) There is no indication in the Scriptures of a reason that God chose the ones He chose, passing over the others, other than it was good in His sight and it was in accord with His purpose to glorify Himself in His grace.

(c) Election is unto salvation. Although certainly God's election of some means His passing over others, hence, a doctrine of reprobation, nevertheless, election is always presented positively unto salvation. Persons are not elected to damnation; persons are elected to salvation.

(2) Secondly, in Colossians 3:12 we read that Christians are "**holy.**" "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy...* Most of the time when we speak of being holy, we are speaking of being morally pure and living righteously. But the word actually conveys the idea of being "separated from" or "set apart." We are to be separated from the fallen world in our attitudes and actions; we are to be holy. That is **practical** holiness. But the Scriptures also speak of believers being **positionally** holy before God. We could describe this as **positional** sanctification. We are sanctified in this sense in that we have been singled out and set apart because God has designs for us that are different from all others.

This positional sanctification was a work of grace on our behalf. Our **positional sanctification occurred once for all time** for each of us at the time of salvation, or, perhaps more specifically when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross. We were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and set apart as the unique people of God. **Hebrews 10:14** reads, "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." This was a work of grace that was accomplished on our behalf apart from us, apart from our work or effort. This was a work of grace that Christ performed on behalf of each of His own. Because God regards us as holy, we are called "saints", or "holy ones."

(3) Thirdly, in Colossians 3:12 we are said to be "**beloved**" of God. Christians are the beloved ones of God. Not all people are beloved of God. Oh yes, God is loving toward all people, in that He does loving things for them and to them. But it is because His very nature is love, not because He loves them as His own. However there is a distinction between His people from all others. He loves His own people with an everlasting love. They are His beloved. God loves His people who are in Jesus Christ with an everlasting covenant love, even the same love that God the Father has for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Cf. John 17:26).

**Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of this special love that Christ has for His people, particularly for His people that are in the world:

[1] Our Lord Jesus has a people in the world that are His own,—His own, for they were given Him by the Father, He has purchased them, and paid dearly for them, and He has set them apart for Himself,—His own, for they have devoted themselves to Him as a peculiar people. *His own*; where *His own* were spoken of that *received Him not*, it is *tous idiotous* —*His own persons*, as a man's wife and children are his own, to whom He stands in a constant relation.

[2.] Christ has a cordial love for His own that are in the world. He *did* love them with a love of goodwill when He gave Himself for their redemption. He *does* love them with a love of complacency when He admits them into communion with Himself. Though they are *in this world*, a world of darkness and distance, of sin and corruption, yet He loves them. He was now going to His own in heaven, the spirits of just men made perfect there; but He seems most concerned for His own on earth, because they most needed His care: ***the sickly child is most indulged.***

[3] Those whom Christ loves *He loves to the end*; He is constant in His love to His people; He *rests in His love*. He loves with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), from everlasting in the counsels of it to everlasting in the consequences of it. Nothing can separate a believer *from the love of Christ*; He

loves His own, *eis telos*—*unto perfection*, for He will perfect what concerns them, will bring them to that world where love is perfect.<sup>9</sup>

After John described the awareness of Jesus of His commission to die, and stated the motivation of Jesus to die—He loved His own—we then read that...

### **B. Jesus began to wash the feet of the disciples (13:2-3)**

This event is recorded in **verses 2** through **5**:

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup>rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup>After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

John first gave the context in which Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. We read that Jesus got up from supper. Perhaps the supper had not yet fully ended. Again, this would have been their formal Passover meal. It was as the supper was ending that the other Gospels (and 1 Cor. 11) record that Jesus established the Lord's Supper with His disciples (cf. Matt. 26:26ff; Mark 14:22ff; Luke 22:17). It is then we read about Judas Iscariot, Simon's son.

We read that “the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him.” Although the Holy Scriptures everywhere testifies that it was God the Father that gave His son to die, the actual events of His betrayal, His trials, His maltreatment, His death on the cross, was due to the malice and malignant work of the devil. Judas Iscariot was responsible for betraying our Lord and causing Him to be arrested by the Jewish authorities. But we read that it was the devil who had put it in his heart to do so. The devil had given him the idea. But certainly Judas' own evil, covetous heart complied with the devil's incitement to sin against our Lord. Again, **Matthew Henry** wrote of the devil's instigation and Judas' willing compliance to betray the Master.

As tracing Judas' treason to its origin; it was a sin of such a nature that it evidently bore the devil's image and superscription. What way of access the devil has to men's hearts, and by what methods he darts in his suggestions, and mingles them undiscerned with those thoughts which are the natives of the heart, we cannot tell. But there are some sins in their own nature so exceedingly sinful, and to which there is so little temptation from the world and the flesh, that it is plain satan lays the egg of them in a heart disposed to be the nest to hatch them in. For Judas to betray such a master, to betray Him so cheaply and upon no provocation, was such downright enmity to God as could not be forged but by satan himself, who thereby thought to ruin the Redeemer's kingdom, but did in fact ruin his own.<sup>10</sup>

The devil is an evil, powerful spiritual being, who is opposed to God and God's people. Hate controls his thinking and hate governs his actions. The name, “satan”, means adversary, that is, he opposes God and His people. The title, “devil”, speaks of him as an accuser; he is an accuser of God's people. He is also called “the tempter” (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5) in that he incites to sin. He is able to place people in a setting or situation in which their sinful nature will be enticed. He seeks to bring our proneness to sin to a place in which there is opportunity to sin. And he is able to put ideas into people's thinking. He is able to do this even with Christians. Peter was influenced by the devil when he rejected

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1090.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the teaching of Jesus that He must suffer and die in Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 16:22f). And here, the devil gave Judas the idea and opportunity to betray Jesus into the hands of those who would put him to death. And yet, we should recognize his limitations.

**J. I. Packer** (b. 1926) wrote of the devil:

Acknowledging satan's reality, taking his opposition seriously, noting his strategy (anything, provided it be not biblical Christianity), and reckoning on always being at war with him—this is not a lapse into a dualistic concept of two gods, one good, one evil, fighting it out. Satan is a creature, superhuman but not divine; he has much knowledge and power, but he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; he can move around in ways that humans cannot, but he is not omnipresent; and he is already a defeated rebel, having no more power than God allows him and being destined for the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).<sup>11</sup>

But God has shown His infinite wisdom in foiling the devil through the cross on which His Son died. The devil instigated Judas to betray his Master and the devil moved the Jewish leaders in their hatred and machinations to put to death Jesus. The devil thought that he was winning the great victory against God by having His Son crucified. But the devil did not perceive the wisdom in the purpose of God to have His Son die, in order to destroy the devil himself and to bring Jesus Christ His Son to His throne over all things. Paul wrote of the gospel that we proclaim, saying, “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:7). We should include the devil in this category of “rulers of this age.” The devil did not see it coming. By the devil having bruised the “heel” of Christ—His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus bruised the “head” of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Jesus vanquished the devil, deposed him, removed him from his former uncontested place of authority. The devil was made subject to King Jesus who was exalted above him. For “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Pet. 3:21f).

But even though the devil had this important role in moving and enabling Judas to betray our Lord, it did not remove the responsibility from the shoulders of Judas for his crime.

When the Evangelist says that Judas had been impelled by *the devil* to form the design of *betraying* Christ, this tends to show the enormity of the crime; for it was dreadful and most atrocious wickedness, in which the efficacy of satan was openly displayed. There is no wickedness, indeed, that is perpetrated by men, to which satan does not excite them, but the more hideous and execrable any crime is, the more ought we to view in it the *rage of the devil*, who drives about, in all possible directions, men who have been forsaken by God. But though the lust of men is kindled into a fiercer flame by satan's fan, still it does not cease to be a furnace; it contains the flame kindled within itself, it receives with avidity the agitation of the fan, so that no excuse is left for wicked men.<sup>12</sup>

We read that the devil instigating Judas to betray Jesus revealed to Jesus that He was soon to depart to be with His Father. Again, **verse 3** records, “*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.*” Again, **John Calvin** gave a sense of this that is to the point:

I am of opinion that this was added for the purpose of informing us whence Christ obtained such a well-regulated composure of mind. It was because, having already obtained a victory over death, He raised His mind to the glorious triumph which was speedily to follow. It usually happens, that men seized with fear are greatly agitated. The Evangelist means, that no agitation of this sort was

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<sup>11</sup> J. I. Packer, **Concise Theology; A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs** (Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, **Calvin's Commentaries**, Vol. XVIII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 55

to be found in Christ, because, though He was to be immediately betrayed by Judas, still He knew that *the Father had given all things into his hand*. It may be asked, How then was He reduced to such a degree of sadness that he sweat blood? I reply, both were necessary. It was necessary that He should have a dread of death, and it was necessary that, notwithstanding of this, He should fearlessly discharge every thing that belonged to the office of the Mediator.

Notice how our Lord depicted His impending death on the cross as a journey He was about to take. “He had come from God” in His incarnation and He “was going to God” through His crucifixion and His resurrection. So we, too, as believers, when the time comes that we face our death, we should view our death as a journey from this world into the presence of our God.

And yet, even though Jesus knew that His time of great suffering and death were just before Him, it did not take His heart and concern off His disciples; it seems to have triggered His action recorded before us. Again, we read **verses 3 and 4**,

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, *<sup>4</sup>rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup>After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*”

Here we read of the great voluntary humbling of Himself, in that He washed the feet of His disciples. In that day even a servant would not be asked by his master to loosen the ties of his sandals as it was viewed such a humiliating thing to do. Only a slave would perform that kind of task.

Some ancient sources even considered the task too demeaning for servants to have to perform for their masters, for to do such work was to be a slave. Thus, although ancient teachers in Judaism usually expected disciples to function as servants, later rabbis allowed one caveat: unlike slaves, they did not tend to the teacher’s sandals.<sup>13</sup>

But here our Lord bowed Himself before each of His disciples to wash their feet.

Let us remember, too, our Lord did this even at the time He was aware that He was returning to His Father and that “the Father had given all things into His hands.” When He was mindful that His highest exaltation was about to take place, He stooped to perform the lowliest service unto His disciples. Of these verses **Donald Carson** wrote,

Jesus’ special knowledge of His Father’s will for Him, articulated in v. 1, is now repeated, but with two significant additions: He knew not only the time had come for Him to leave this world, but that *he had come from God* and that *the Father had put all things under His power*. With such power and status at His disposal, we might have expected Him to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation, and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath. Instead, He washes His disciples’ feet, including the feet of the betrayer.<sup>14</sup>

He even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot, who had been one of His disciples.

Here we see that when we are aware of the great standing that God has conferred upon us as His children and the great destiny that is before us in that we will share in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, it should not result in us becoming proud and selfish, but rather, we are to be humble and to be in service to others. Authority and positions of leadership in the kingdom of God is the occasion of greater humility and service, not a cause of personal notoriety and the desire to be exalted in the minds of other people. As **Matthew Henry** stated:

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<sup>13</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> Carson, p. 462.

Note, a well-grounded assurance of heaven and happiness, instead of puffing a man up with pride, will make and keep him very humble. Those that would be found conformable to Christ, and partakers of His Spirit, must study to keep their minds low in the midst of the greatest advancements.<sup>15</sup>

We read in the Old Testament of the humble Abigail, that when she learned that she was about to become the wife of King David, a queen in Israel, she humbled herself. We read in 1 Samuel 25:40f,

When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.”

And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” (1 Sam. 25:40f)

Abigail was quite Christ-like in her attitude and words which revealed her commitment to servitude regardless of her exaltation among her people.

There was nothing in this action of our Lord that would commend Him in the eyes of others. Jesus did so in order to illustrate and demonstrate the kind of attitude and the kind of actions that should characterize His people. And this example was not only for His few apostles before Him, but for you and me, if we are true disciples of Jesus Christ. The spirit of arrogance, the lack of desire, or the expressed unwillingness to be humble before others and seek their well-being above your own, should not characterize us who are followers of Jesus Christ.

Jesus “*rose from supper and laid aside His garments.*” On one occasion Christ would not leave off His preaching in order to please His own relations (Mark 3:33), but He “would leave His supper to show His love for His disciples” (Matthew Henry). And He would not allow anything to hinder His service and the task at hand. He removed the garment that would hinder Him in His service. He thereby taught us that we, too, should take off from ourselves anything that might hinder us in our service to the Lord’s people.

Jesus served them all, from the least to the greatest. He did not skip one. So He now serves each and every one of us who are His disciples, providing everything which we need, and even much of what we do not necessarily need, but desire. This teaches us that we are to be servants to all of our Lord’s disciples, not just some that we might favor over others. Every Christian is a new creation in Christ. And therefore we are to be as Paul,

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. <sup>18</sup>Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:16-19)

Next week, Lord willing, we will consider Peter’s reaction to Jesus’ action (13:6-9)

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“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 1091.

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